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DEPT FOR AF BUREAU A/S CARSON FROM AMBASSADOR ALLEN
PARIS FOR AF WATCHER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [NG](#)
SUBJECT: WORKING LUNCH WITH FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO DISCUSS
THE NIGERIEN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

REF: A. NIAMEY 466
[1](#)B. NIAMEY 381

Classified By: Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen, Reason: 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. On June 24, French Ambassador Alain Holleville and I discussed the political environment in Niger, notably the Government of Niger's (GON) posture after the June 12, 2009 Constitutional Court ruling that President Tandja's proposed constitutional referendum is not in conformity with the Constitution. We concluded that Tandja's signing the decree to permit the legislative election on August 20, as proposed by the National Independent Election Commission (CENI), may be the only official act to mark Tandja's recognition that his proposed constitutional referendum cannot go forward. Holleville noted that without donor partner support for the August legislative election, the GON could use the lack of funding as a pretext to postpone the election. He also disclosed that "his capital" asked him to pass a message indirectly to Tandja, as opposed to the more visible U.S. demarche, to emphasize the Government of France's (GOF) position that Tandja should respect the Nigerien Constitution. He probed for information on my May 27 demarche on Tandja (ref b). End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) French Amb. Holleville phoned me on the morning of June 24 to state he wished to speak with me about the political environment in Niger. I invited him to the official residence for a working lunch that same day. We opened the discussion noting the GON silence since the Court's June 12 ruling that Tandja's proposed referendum is unconstitutional. We concluded that the long silence may equate to Tandja's acquiescence that his constitutional referendum is no longer viable. Highlighting the various demarches from within the subregion and from outside the continent, we deduced that Tandja may have finally come to the realization that all avenues to move forward with his constitutional referendum may be blocked. We agreed that the longer the GON remained silent on the matter the better the chance the announced, now advanced legislative elections would go forward, especially since Tandja had signed the decree to endorse CENI's proposed legislative election date. We also believe that Tandja may have signed off on the legislative election date because of his inability to conduct some state business without the approval of a legislative body. We did not rule out, however, that Tandja may continue to maneuver in search of a loophole to go forward with his referendum plan. We agreed that while GON Prime Minister had stated on June 23 at the Ecowas Summit in Abuja that the GON would respect the constitution, that we didn't expect that Tandja would consider the referendum issue finished. (Note: Later, on the evening of June 24, our suspicions were confirmed when GON Spokesperson Ben Omar announced on state television a request from Tandja that the Constitutional Court review its June 12 decree, to be reported septel. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) We both spoke of the current unease in the donor partner community with regard to election support because of the cloud of the referendum hovering over the election timetable. Until such time as the referendum is completely

ruled out, the community remains concerned that some election support might be diverted to conduct the referendum. Holleville raised the concern that donor partner failure to provide election support could be used as a pretext for the GON to postpone elections. I opined that I suspect Tandja can't make too bold a move until after the legislative elections and added that donors may wish to disperse support in three blocks, starting with the imminent legislative election. That way, if a constitutional referendum somehow materialized, we could wash our hands of that matter, and only return with blocks of support, respectively, for the subsequent local and Presidential elections. Holleville stated he is scheduled to make a brief visit to Paris next week and that he plans to inquire about how the GOF election support plans. I replied that the USG is still working on election support, as we want to see the legislative elections launched.

14. (C) Holleville mentioned there were "echoes" about my demarche on Tandja, after the population saw images of my visit, without commentary, on state television (Tele-Sahel) and in the state newspaper (Le Sahel). He said he heard that the Foreign Minister and others were scolded for not having warned Tandja about the reason for the demarche. I responded that the Foreign Minister was not in country on the date of my demarche, as she had been dispatched to Sirte, Libya, as part of the GON advance team for the CENSAD Summit. I added that perhaps the "echoes" came from Tandja's Chief of Staff or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General, as I had requested they leave the room to permit me to speak with the President one-on-one. Holleville then stated he wanted to reaffirm that the GOF is on the same page as the USG and other donor partners, but it is using a different approach. He informed me that his headquarters asked him to pass a message to Tandja, but to deliver the message in a low-key manner because the situation was a bit delicate for the GOF. He said he passed the message from Paris to one of his contacts who is close to Tandja, and that while he is hopeful the message was conveyed, he has no way to confirm whether it actually had been delivered. He commented that a recent conference call between Paris and Washington on the Nigerien political environment was a good thing, that he hopes it continues. He also suggested he and I continue to meet periodically to discuss the political situation in Niger, but not too frequently, so that we can't be accused of plotting against Tandja.

ALLEN